



Learn English Through Stories

E Series

E40

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1. When Yama Called

By Sudha Murty

One day, Grandma was sitting and stitching a tear in an old sari. The children came and sat around her. The holidays were finishing and they did not want to be away from her for even a minute. Meenu and Krishna affectionately put their arms around Grandma's neck and said, 'Grandma, why do you have so many wrinkles on your hand?'

'Because I am old,' said Grandma.

'Why do old people have wrinkles?' asked Meenu.

Grandma took off her glasses, which she wore only when sewing or reading, and said, 'Once upon a time I was also young like you. My skin was smooth and shiny. My hair was long and black. I had very sharp eyes and an excellent memory. But as I grew older, everything changed slowly.'

'We will all grow old like this one day, shan't we?' asked Divya.

'Yes, every living being gets old. It is a part of life. Come, I will tell you a story about old age.'



Many, many years ago, there lived, in a little town, a man named Arun. He was a merchant and though not very rich, he lived comfortably enough. He had a large family of brothers, sisters, wife and children. He looked after them well, and in whatever way he could, he also helped out the poor people in the town. He built rest houses for travellers, and in these there were dining halls where anyone could come and have a good, wholesome meal for very little money.

One day, while returning home from work, he happened to pass by one such rest house. It had a veranda where people stopped and rested. Sitting there, looking tired and hungry, was a stranger. He was a tall man. His clothes were travel-stained and showed that he had come from afar. With him was his horse, looking as tired and hungry as its master.

Seeing them, Arun's kind heart melted, and he went up to speak to the man.

‘Where have you come from, my brother?’ he asked. ‘Why don’t you step inside for a hot meal and some rest?’

The man looked up, gave a smile and said, ‘The rest house is very popular. There is no room for me, and the dining hall is full too. I will wait here for a while, then be on my way. I’m sure I will find another place to serve me some food down the road.’

Arun would not hear of this. The thought that someone was going away without food and rest was too much for him. He insisted on the man coming back to his house with him. There he invited the traveller to share a meal with his family. The man was served lovingly and ate his fill.

While he sat eating, the man noticed that Arun was sometimes a bit absent-minded. It was as if something was on his mind, and he was worried. Once they had finished eating and had washed up, the traveller rose to leave. He thanked Arun for his kindness, then said, ‘If you don’t mind me asking, sir, I could not help but notice that you were a bit worried. I know I am a stranger to you, but perhaps it would help lighten your burden if you shared your worries with me.’

But Arun only smiled and shook his head. He did not want to share his thoughts with the stranger.

Then the man said, ‘Perhaps if I show you who I really am you will confide in me.’

And in a trice the man changed. He was no longer a tired traveller, but a god, resplendent in shimmering clothes with a crown on his head. His horse changed into a buffalo, and the man introduced himself, ‘I am Yama, the lord of death. Now will you tell me what’s wrong?’

Seeing this Arun nearly fainted. The lord of death had just shared a meal with him! ‘Wh-what are you doing on earth, my lord?’ he gasped.

Yama smiled and said, ‘Oh, I like coming here once in a while, and seeing what everyone is doing. So, what’s bothering you?’

Arun replied, ‘You see, I need to grow my business more, but today I was not feeling very well. If anything happened to me, who would look after my large family?’

Yama nodded seriously. 'Don't worry, child,' he comforted. 'I have seen what a hard-working, kind-hearted person you are. You invited me home and let me have a meal with you, knowing me only to be a tired and weary traveller. I will do one thing. when it is time for you to leave the earth and come with me, like all living things have to do one day, I will not come all of a sudden. I will let you know many days in advance, so you can prepare yourself and your affairs for the time you have to go away with me.'

Arun bowed to the lord in gratitude when he heard this and Yama vanished.

Years went by. Arun became an old man. His business had grown many times over, his children and brothers and sisters were all well looked after. He had few worries left.

One night, he went to bed and had a dream. He saw Yama standing in front of him. Yama was holding out a hand towards him and saying, 'Come, it is time for you to go away with me.'

Arun was terrified. 'But lord, you had promised you would tell me days in advance before I would die. How can I come away right now?'

A small smile appeared on Yama's lips. 'But child, I did give you a warning. I made your hair turn white, I made your back stoop with age, I made your teeth fall out one by one. These were all indications that your time on earth is coming to an end.'

'But these things happen to every man and woman! How could these be a warning only for me!'

Yama nodded, 'Yes, they do happen to everyone. And when they do, men and women should start getting ready to meet me. Life has to come to an end, there is no escape.'



Arun now understood. He looked back on his days and realized that even without meaning to, he had been preparing for this. His children looked after his business, all his work was done. There was nothing stopping him from going away with his old friend Yama.

He climbed on the buffalo behind Yama. 'Let's go,' he said. And off Yama went away with him.

2. The Unending Story

Today Grandpa, Grandma and Vishnu Kaka were all feeling sad. The children's holidays were nearly over, and it was nearing the time when they would go back to their homes. For three weeks the houses had echoed with their laughter, games and quarrels. Now all would be quiet once again, till they returned for the next holiday. The children too were feeling sad, and had gathered around their grandparents in a tight little group. Raghu the eldest said, 'We had more fun this holiday than we've ever had. Even more than when we visited Disneyland. And it was all because of the stories.'

Grandpa said, 'When I was still working as a schoolteacher, I always found it was so much easier to get my students' attention when I told the lessons in the form of stories.'

Anand said, 'I find it really boring to read history from a book. But if you tell us the stories from history I'm sure we will remember everything!'

Everyone now turned their bright eyes on Grandma. 'How can you tell us only one story even on this last day, Grandma! We want more!' they clamoured.

But Grandma shook her head. 'If you eat only pickles and laddoos will you be healthy? Stories are like that. You can't spend all your time listening to stories. Then it will be boring. Like the unending story that a king once had to hear.'



'I want a story! And that's an order!' shouted King Pratap Singh of Mayanagar. King Pratap was only fifteen years old, and still a boy at heart. He didn't like being a king much, because he was supposed to be doing serious things like keeping the law, listening to his people's problems and all kinds of dreary things like that. The only part he liked about being a ruler was that everyone had to obey him! How he loved giving orders and making all kinds of demands. And what he loved the most was listening to stories! Every day, he insisted on listening to at least ten stories. All the storytellers in his kingdom lined up at his

court. They told him funny stories, scary stories, magical stories and anything else that came to their mind. King Pratap listened to all with rapt attention.

He loved stories and storytellers so much that whenever he heard a good tale he would shower the teller with gold, silver and all kinds of wonderful presents. His ministers sighed and shook their heads and tried to explain, 'Your Majesty, stories are all very well, but you should be listening to them after your work is done! Your people need you to do so many things for them. If you spend all your time wrapped up in fantasies, how will the land prosper?'

But King Pratap paid no attention. It was stories he wanted, and stories he would get. But how long could the people provide him with stories? Soon the tales began to dry out. Some tried to cleverly tell him ones they had related long back, but Pratap was sharp as a needle. 'I've heard that one! Off with his head for repeating a story!'

Oh, how his ministers had to plead with him to pardon the culprits!

Finally, disgusted with all the storytellers in his land, the king announced, 'I want someone to tell me a story that will go on and on, till I ask him to stop. Anyone who can do this will get half my kingdom as a prize!'

His ministers were even more horrified at this. Half the kingdom to some woolly-headed writer and teller of stories! How horrible! They all tried to show the king the foolishness of his ways, but he was adamant. A story that lasted for days, even weeks, was what he wanted and that was that!

Soon a long line of men and women appeared at his court. Each one wanted to win the big prize. But none of their stories were good enough for King Pratap.

'Boring!' he shouted at some.

'Rubbish!' he yelled at others.

'Cock and bull!' he bellowed at yet others.

Meanwhile work on the kingdom's affairs had come to a stop. All the ministers were sitting wringing their hands and wondering how to bring back their king to solving all the important issues. Finally the chief minister, who was wise and clever, had an idea.

The next day, a scruffy, crazy-looking man turned up at the court. His hair was in a mess, his clothes were half torn and on his feet he wore torn shoes from which his toes stuck out. He marched up to the palace and demanded to be given an audience with the king. The guards sighed and let him in. They were used to

having all kinds of characters turning up at the gates wanting to tell stories to the king.

The old man was admitted into the king's chamber. There he made himself comfortable, drank a huge jug of water, and without introducing himself, started his story:

'This story begins in a humble farmer's field. The farmer had toiled days and weeks and months and grown a bumper crop of sugar cane. He sold the sugar cane to the nearby sugar factory and they made sacks and sacks of sugar out of it. Everyone was so happy. All this sugar would be sold in the markets and make everyone very rich! That year their children would get nice new clothes, their stores would be full of food and their wives would be very happy with them!

'Now all that sugar had to be stored and kept carefully till the sacks could be taken to the market to sell. The factory people poured the sugar into many sacks and lugged them into a storeroom. In the storeroom who would you find, but a colony of ants. They had decided that building their house near such a ready supply of their favourite food was a very good idea, and were always on the lookout for new batches of sugar to be stored there.

'No sooner had the sacks been kept than the lines of ants marched up to them. They found little holes to make their way in and the first ant went into the first bag of sugar, took one sugar crystal and went back.

'The next ant went into the bag and took a crystal and returned home.

'Another went into the bag and took a crystal and returned home.

'Yet another went into the bag and took a crystal and returned home . . .'

So on and on the storyteller droned. King Pratap found he had nearly dozed off, the day had passed by and he was still listening to the same story.

'Stop! Stop!' he ordered. 'I will listen to the rest of the story tomorrow.'

The next morning the old man turned up as usual and started from where he had left off the previous day. 'Yesterday I was telling you how the ants came and picked up the sugar crystals. Now the next ant went towards the bag of sugar and took a crystal and went back home. Another went and took a sugar crystal and returned home. Another ant . . .'

The story went on and on like this. Lunch and dinner passed by but nothing new happened. By now King Pratap was bursting with rage. How dare anyone

tell him such a boring story? 'What kind of a story is this?' he complained. 'What will happen next? What happened to the farmer?'



But the old man only smiled and said, 'Have patience, Your Majesty. That year the yield was very good and there were thousands of bags of sugar. I have to tell you how the ants collected all the sugar.'

'Oh stop! Stop!' Pratap shouted. 'Stop this boring story at once!'

The man now stood up and said, 'Fine, if you are ordering me to stop, I have won the prize. Give me half your kingdom!'

The king was in a dilemma now. He had announced a competition and prize no doubt, but could he honestly give away half the kingdom to this crazy- looking storyteller with his boring tales?

As he sat pondering, the man grinned even wider, and took off his dirty robe, rubbed off the dirt from his face and shook back his shaggy white hair. Everyone was astonished. Why, this was the chief minister himself!

'Don't worry, Your Majesty,' the minister told his overjoyed king. 'I did not want half your kingdom. I only wanted to show you how you were wrong to neglect your work and listen to stories night and day. Your people deserve a good king, someone who will work hard to look after them; someone who will think of his own happiness only once his people are happy. That's what good kings do, you know. Not just giving orders and enjoying yourself.'

Poor Pratap looked ashamed at this. Yes, he had been an extremely selfish king. From now on, story time was only at night, after all his work was done.



So that was how the summer holidays ended. Everyone packed their bags and reached the station. Their mothers had come to take them back home. Grandpa, Grandma, Vishnu Kaka, Damu, Rehmat Chacha—everyone had come to see them off. No one felt like leaving Grandma's side and Meenu kept hugging her till she had to board the train.

Soon the train puffed out of the station. The children leaned out to wave their goodbyes. Slowly Shiggaon got left behind. But the children would continue to remember their Grandpa and Grandma and everyone else, and all the stories, which would remain with them forever. And they would be back, during the next summer holidays, when they would hear so many more . . .

3. Grammar Page

Verbs and Tenses: The Future Tense

To talk about **facts in the future** or **plans that will not change**, use the **simple present tense**.

Tomorrow **is** Sunday.

Summer vacation **ends** on Friday.

The new library **opens** next week.

We **fly** to Paris on Wednesday.

You can also talk about **plans for the future** and other **future happenings** by using **be going to** and another verb. Remember to:

- Use **am** and **was** with the pronoun **I**.
- Use **is** and **was** with the pronouns **he**, **she** and **it**, and with **singular nouns** like 'my mom' and 'the teacher'.
- Use **are** and **were** with the pronouns **we**, **you** and **they**, and with **plural nouns** like 'my friends' and 'John and Sally'.

I am going to visit my cousin tomorrow.

I am going to see the new Star Wars movie next week.

My friend John is going to move to Chicago next year.

Dad is going to buy me a skateboard.

Aunt Jane is going to have another baby soon.

It is going to be windy tomorrow.

I hope **someone is going to fix** the television soon.

You are going to help me, aren't you?

My friends are going to teach me how to play chess.

Mom and Dad are going to buy a new computer.

Your books are going to fall off the shelf if you're not careful.

Are you going to read your book now?